

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors,

It occurred to me on reading Manu Bazzano's article (summer issue of *S&S*) that, like Descartes and much of Western intellectual philosophizing, he falls into the trap of 'I think therefore I am'. The truer statement is surely 'I think and feel and sense in this present moment, therefore I am'.

He rejects 'the spiritual' with 'to think of consciousness as separate, as witness to an ever-changing world, is a consolation'. To me this shows a lack of depth, or a misunderstanding of the experience of being fully present to the space, silence, love and energy of the 'here and now'. What he rejects as Wilber's 'attempt to validate metaphysical notions of consciousness' with its implicitly 'neurotic' need for 'reassurance' is actually a rejection of many people's experience. He chooses to interpret them as concepts, rather than descriptions of experience. His post-modern perspective is surely itself an expression of unresolved insecurity and a rejection of suffering (just what he accuses spiritual metaphysics of doing! There is nothing quite like the psychotherapists game of 'It's you who's projecting, not me!'). Intellectualizing, though, is a projective defence.

Bazzano argues against Wilber's 'positive psychology' and its 'grand evolutionary climb towards super-consciousness' saying that it is a 'denial of death'. Again, I think that this misses the point; it is post-modernism that is avoiding suffering/death by making everything relative and therefore avoidable. The movement towards healing the trauma behind our insecurity (whichever of the myriad forms it takes) is through facing our suffering and this is in the end towards facing the ultimate suffering of the loss of self in death. As we become more reconciled, as we know ourselves better and are able to increasingly open our hearts, our heads and embody our energy and live in the present, we become less afraid of death. The aim must surely be to find our reconciliation with death through this process of transcending of our ego (i.e. undoing our defensive avoidance or identification with our suffering). In the end, it is death that brings meaning to our lives. There are many wonderful descriptions of dying people finding such a profound reconciliation (e.g. Levine, 1982).

The deeply interrelated experiences of witnessing, of love and energetic beingness, do bring meaning, they connect us to what is greater than ourselves. This is towards living simply and directly in Beingness with its open consciousness, open heart and open body. (Integrating all three is necessary for the whole to be greater than, i.e. transcend, the sum of the parts.)

Spiritual experience is not something 'distinct from the world of phenomena'; it is rooted in our visceral experience of deep 'here and now' moments of living, in living in question and openness, in the movement away from living life as a victim, to living with awareness and ownership of ourselves where we can 'be' and bear whatever 'now' brings. Many do use 'spirituality' as a defence in all sorts of ways, but we can equally use anything, even 'post-structuralism' for this.

In the end, I agree with Goswami (2008) and Watts (1966), who support the ancient Hindu idea that we are here to realize and become conscious of ourselves and therefore embody the universe seeing itself. This makes sense of our inbuilt, overarching need to journey towards 'beingness' and transcend our ego. It makes sense of the Zen 'jump' into seeing that there is no light without dark, no universe without a witness, i.e. the miracle of consciousness. Together with the transformation into seeing our glass as half full. 'Enlightenment can only ever, be, now.'

To Bazzano this developmental perspective implies a denial of difference and the creation of a 'preposterous centrality assigned to the human subject'. All I can say is that in my experience

we do share a common humanity, freedom is possible, it is connected to something 'objective', something beyond culture and time, despite everyone's path being entirely unique.

We need to get past post-modernism or/and structuralism's debilitating relativism for this positive developmental story to become more generally understood and accepted. It is a psycho-spiritual story of hope and creativity based on practical and realizable steps that can open our hearts, expand our consciousness and sensitize our bodies.

References

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- Watts, A. (1966). *The book: On the taboo against knowing who you are*. London: Jonathan Cape.

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